ED 155 881 IMPLEMENTATION OF INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMMING: SOME OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

1 OF 1 SCHIPPER, WILLIAM; WILSON, WILLIAM NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE DIRECTORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION, WASHINGTON, D.C. 78 19P.

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 155 881 EC 110 913

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TITLE Implementation of Individualized Education Programming: Some Observations and Recommendations.
INSTITUTION National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 19p.; For related information, see EC 110 914

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; *Handicapped Children; *Individualized Programs; Inservice Teacher Education; *Institutes (Training Programs); Workshops

ABSTRACT

The paper describes research, specific problem areas, and resources of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) regarding individualized education programs (IEPs) for handicapped children. Listed are such negative research findings as concern about increased time demands on teachers, as well as positive findings, including improved services for children. Specific problem areas encountered by school personnel in the IEP process are reviewed, and NASDSE's role in providing training in IEP processes are considered. (CL)

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ED155881

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IMPLEMENTATION OF INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMMING: SOME OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EC110 913

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Preface

This paper is presented with the view in mind that it may be helpful to state and local education agency personnel in re-examining their efforts in implementing Individualized Educational Programs under P.L. 94-142.

The information, ideas and suggestions presented herein are based on two years of direct involvement in conducting IEP workshops nationally, of numerous discussions with administrators, teachers and parents, and on findings of research on IEPs and discussions with researchers.

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James R. Galloway
Executive Director

IMPLEMENTATION OF INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING: A PROBLEM OR AN OPPORTUNITY?

by

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This paper will be presented in three sections. The first part will deal with a summary of some of the relevant findings of three major research studies on IEPs which have recently been completed and with concerns of state education agency and local education agency personnel collected by NASDSE staff in a series of workshops which we have conducted around the country. The second part will focus on some specific problem areas encountered in the IEP process by school personnel. Recommendations pertaining to the problem areas will be presented as well as how to prevent or deal with process problems as they arise. The third part of the paper will be a description of NASDSE's resources and materials to assist trainers and practitioners in their implementation of IEPs and the group planning process.

National Research Data

Listed below are some of the findings of research[1] which has been conducted around the country on the IEP process. Though the research is new, most of the findings had been anticipated and are not necessarily surprising. For example:

- Teachers are concerned about the increased time demanded of them to participate in meetings, completing forms and documenting plans
- Teachers have expressed concerns that they are being asked to perform tasks for which they had not been trained. These include performing formal and informal instructional assessments; developing annual goals and short-term objectives; managing individualized classroom instruction; and communicating with parents
- Supervisors and directors say that projecting goals and objectives for a specific period of time and matching appropriate materials with goals and objectives is causing major problems for teachers
- In many cases, teachers are becoming disenchanted with the planning team process due to a small participation role relative to the dominant roles administrators and school psychologist types have taken
- Students' participation in the planning process is virtually non-existent
- Teachers and administrators often do not understand their role in the planning team process nor do they understand the responsibilities that go with the role

Data is showing that not all of the problems are in the same LEA or SEA jurisdiction but that a combination of these factors

has caused some to hypothesize that teachers will experience lowered morale and job dissatisfaction. This may ultimately lead to teachers rapidly vacating their special education teaching positions.

On the bright side, the findings of the research studies indicated the following:

- more children are being identified and the overall services are better and are improving
- the process of writing IEPs gave the participants in IEP meetings "good feelings"
- many teachers reported that the IEP process was a valuable aid in their role, requiring them to think about and analyze their teaching and actually saved them time during the year in planning lessons. Assessments focused their attention on the child, and writing goals and objectives structured their thinking about where they were going during the year.
- those teachers also found systematic recordkeeping useful in motivating pupils. They reported that objectives written in measurable terms and shared with students caused students to enjoy evaluating their own daily or weekly progress toward that objective and to strive to improve their performance
- districts which provided administrative support services, involved teachers in system analysis and system planning, and provided inservice training on

a regular basis tended to have minimal problems--attitudinally--in implementing IEP procedures

NASDSE Observations

NASDSE staff have conducted more than 60 workshops and presentations throughout the United States on the IEP process since May, 1976. During these workshops, concerns on the implementation of IEPs have frequently been expressed by SEA and LEA personnel. Although there was no research design or analysis applied in the collection or validation of these concerns, it was interesting to note the similarities between the workshop observations and the findings of the three major studies previously discussed. Briefly, some of the common concerns are listed below:

- teachers often viewed the IEP as a way in which they would be evaluated as to the quality of their teaching
- both teachers and administrators were concerned about time away from the classroom
- administrators have often passed responsibility for writing and implementing IEPs to classroom teachers
- administrators and teachers have often interpreted the IEP as a daily lesson plan, and have consequently been under the impression that very specific objectives should be included
- administrators and teachers have interpreted written objectives to mean that they must be behaviorally stated

- confusion has existed at both the SEA and LEA levels as to whether the IEP should be written before or after placement
- confusion has existed regarding the number of persons that should be on the IEP committee
- the process for providing assessment data to the IEP committee has not been clearly established

Other concerns and observations were noted which have direct implications for the need for comprehensive inservice training.

Implications for Administrators

The concept of individualized educational programming for handicapped children is clearly not new in special education. However, previous efforts to achieve implementation at the classroom level on a widespread basis have not been successful.

What these efforts have in common is that they have tended to focus on the teacher and have attempted to only change teacher behavior. However, changing teacher behavior is not enough. The research and observations noted above suggest that even the most highly motivated teachers cannot truly implement individualized programming unless there is carefully planned administrative support available at the district level and unless traditional evaluation--eligibility--programming--placement procedures are altered.

The findings listed above should suggest the need for rapid intervention by planners, administrators and inservice agents to correct--or better yet, to never allow--the negative situations which seem to be developing. Research and common sense both suggest that good administrative practice such as allowing for teacher involvement in planning for educational change and for planning and meeting their own inservice needs can go a long way towards reducing or eliminating many of the problems noted here.

A comment from a paper recently written by a research team from the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped summarizes some of the realities and some of the promises for easier implementation of IEPs.

> The history of individualized educational programming for handicapped children cautions against excessive optimism that the day of implementation is here. Certainly the required changes in teacher role are major, the danger of lowered morale and dissatisfaction exist, and the requisite resource systems are comprehensive and complete. At the same time, there is some reason to believe that the legislative mandate provided by P.L. 94-142 may cause local and state special education administrators to join with special education teachers in searching for viable policies, practices, and resource systems for implementing individualized educational programming at the classroom level. Clearly, the best and only chance for widespread implementation is dependent upon the cooperation and shared responsibility of all special educators.[2]

The writers noted that teacher involvement and administrative support were two key elements that were not present in situations that had resulted in the development of negative attitudes on the part of school personnel regarding the IEP process. Indeed,

the results of studies showed benefits and positive attitudes were present when teachers were involved in the total IEP process from the district planning phase through classroom implementation. For example, in districts where IEP implementation was comparatively smooth and in operation, it was found that administrators provided: 1) support for teachers in assessment systems, 2) educational materials cross-referenced to objectives, 3) standardized forms, or the involvement of teachers in format design, and 4) consultative assistance. Additionally, administrators provided a communication system whereby teacher concerns were allowed to be voiced and heard by administrative personnel. Therefore, the combination of teacher involvement and administrative support contributed to the transition to successful implementation of IEPs.

Practical Considerations to Problem Areas

Before IEPs are successfully implemented, administrators and practitioners need to not only know P.L. 94-142 requirements, but also need to implement workable solutions to problem areas that arise in developing programs to meet the unique needs of handicapped children. In developing practical solutions, the following elements should be considered:

Assessment as on ongoing process. Assessment should be viewed as a process leading to IEP development and classroom instruction rather than solely as a function to determine eligibility or to make a placement decision. Figure 1 depicts

assessment as a cyclical activity which begins after identification, plays an intricate part in committee IEP development, and is continuously monitored and recorded by teachers in the classroom. Classroom data is then again cycled into the placement team as assessment information in the review process. Thus, it is not a legal or a practical necessity for a psychologist or an educational diagnostician to participate in all IEP meetings, though each may play an important role in providing information to committees for developing programs.

Number and type of persons at IEP meeting. P.L. 94-142 requires only three individuals to sit on a child's IEP committee, (the teacher, the parent, and an LEA representative qualified to provide or supervise the provision of special educational services) and whenever appropriate, the child. Requirements also specify that one of the persons on the committee be knowledgeable about and be able to interpret assessment information. Unfortunately, some districts have had as many as 15 to 20 persons on an IEP committee. This presents an intimidating situation to parents, poses unwieldy process problems, and forces the obvious question--WHY? Granted, in some cases as many as 15 individuals may have important information which could positively affect the child's program. However, we suggest that much of this information can be provided to the committee in the form of concise reports which can be communicated to members prior to the IEP meetings.

- NON-BIASED
- MORE THAN ONE APPROACH

- GROUP PROCESS
- WRITTEN PROGRAM
  - GOALS/OBJECTIVES
  - SERVICES
  - TIMETABLE
  - PLACEMENT
  - MONITORING SCHEDULE

- INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES
- RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT

We further suggest that the law of parsimony should apply here: as small a group as possible which is thoroughly knowledgeable about the child, in order to determine the best possible program for each handicapped child.

IEP before placement. The IEP must be developed before the child is placed in a special education program in order to be in strict compliance with P.L. 94-142. Further, the placement decision must be based upon the IEP. Unfortunately, because of historical precedent, misunderstanding and/or an unwillingness to change existing practices, many LEAs are making placement decisions first, and then ask teachers to write IEPs. Until this pattern or practice changes, the correct concept of the development and role of the IEP cannot be realized.

IEP--a management tool, not a daily lesson plan. The IEP is not meant to be a daily lesson plan for teachers. Because annual goals and short-term objectives are required, the role of objectives has caused confusion. Objectives may be more or less specific depending on the makeup of the committee but the intent of the IEP is to delineate an overall program for the child. We suggest the child's teacher(s) may wish to treat the committee level objectives as classroom goals and in turn develop more specific objectives for the child's monthly, weekly, or daily plan.

Can IEP "Quality" be Measured?

A frequently asked question in workshops and presentations is, "What is a quality IEP?" Early investigators of this question report that the quality range has been great. Plans have varied from a simple ditto check sheet to very sophisticated comprehensive documents supported by materials. The size of IEPs have ranged from one page to 40 pages.

We suggest that "quality" can be attained only if correct sequential procedures are followed in developing an IEP. That is, the IEP is based on formal and informal assessment information, takes into account the least restrictive environment and provides for specially designed instruction and services to meet the child's unique needs.

Planning team members should take the following into account when writing short-term objectives:

- objectives should denote an expected change in the child's behavior
- objectives should be stated in measurable terms--this will assist in the evaluation function
- objectives should be approximations of long term goals. It is important that the goals are based on the needs as determined by the child's current level of educational performance.

When educational goals have been determined, we believe the following four criteria will assist committee members in evaluating the appropriateness or quality of the IEP:

1. Does it communicate?
2. Is it a basis for instruction?
3. Is it a basis for evaluation?
4. Is it meaningful for the child?

Impact of Forms

A number of states have developed and mandated statewide forms for use by all LEAs, others have developed "sample" forms which LEAs might use. The majority of states have left it open to LEAs to develop their own forms. Whatever approach, our observations have been that the form itself is an important factor in eliciting the type and quality of information which is appearing on IEPs. For example, if two lines are provided for "statement of educational performance", IEP developers will tend to fill that space only. This follows the old adage, unfortunate in this case, that "structure dictates function," rather than the reverse.

We suggest that one way around this problem is for administrators and teachers together to develop and revise IEP forms to meet maximum effectiveness while meeting the requirements of the law.

Briefly, we have frequently noted the absence of one or more of the following elements from IEP forms from around the country:

- lack of assessment data
- no mention of the percent of time the child will spend in regular education
- no mention of the type of physical education program the child will receive
- lack of place to note the date the IEP was developed
- lack of names or identifiers of persons who developed the IEP (often the names will appear, but titles will be absent, such as parent, teacher, school psychologist, etc.)

IEP Training

This leads to a brief discussion of NASDSE's role in training in the IEP process and the services we have provided. In May, 1976, six months after P.L. 94-142 was passed, NASDSE developed a workshop for the training of trainers, consultants and members of IEP committees. Since then, NASDSE staff have conducted more than 50 IEP workshops for SEA and LEA personnel around the country in which approximately 3,000 participants have been involved.

The workshop is designed so that participants:

- understand provisions of P.L. 94-142, particularly as they relate to placement committees and the development of IEPs
- have the simulated experience of sering on a placement committee and developing a quality IEP

- become acquainted with a training model to be used in LEAs
- become familiar with the Resource Manual and its uses as a training aide and as a reference for local placement committees
- are exposed to various media, materials, and activities that may be used in local workshops
- gain an understanding of some of the problems that will arise as local school districts implement the IEP process

The workshop can be conducted in one or one and one half day settings depending upon the needs of the participants. Evalutions have consistently shown the workshop to be very relevant, informative and productive for the participants.

A resource manual, Functions of the Placement Committee in Special Education is the major resource for the workshop. The manual was developed by NASDSE in cooperation with the Kentucky Department of Education and a number of individuals who contributed to its conception, development and field testing. To date, more than 22,000 of these manuals have been disseminated nationally. It is also being used in a number of undergraduate and graduate special education courses in colleges and universities nationally.

A 15-minute cartoon slide show illustrating the IEP process, A Trainer's Guide for Conducting IEP Workshops, and a booklet containing the findings of the three research projects mentioned

previously are other resources used in the workshop. All of these are available for purchase from our National Office.

Summary

Reaching the goal of full services to all handicapped individuals is a major task for SEAs and LEAs to accomplish. The IEP is at the heart of this goal in that it addresses each child's unique educational needs. Though P.L. 94-142 is now reality, we are still a long way off from effective implementation at the classroom level. We suggest that participatory planning, involving all levels and all disciplines relative to the education of the handicapped, must take place in order for the promise of national legislation to be realized. Problems in process will arise but as state and local education agencies implement their new responsibilities, the problems can provide an opportunity for creative, stimulating and innovative ways to meet the needs of handicapped children.

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